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THE MINISTER AND THE BOY

I. THE CALL OF BOYHOOD

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The Christian apologetic for today depends less upon the arguments of speculative theology and the findings of biblical science than upon sociological considerations. The church is dealing with a pragmatic public which insists upon knowing what this or that institution accomplishes for the common good. The deep and growing interest in social science, the crying needs that it lays bare, together with socialistic dreams of human warfare, compel Christian workers to pay more heed to the life that now is, since individualistic views of salvation in the world to come do not fully satisfy the modern consciousness. Hence the ministry is compelled more and more to address itself to the salvation of the community and the nation after the fashion of the Hebrew prophets. Lines of distinction also between what is religious and what is secular in education and in all human intercourse have become irregular or dim; and the task of bringing mankind to fulness and perfection of life has become the task alike of the educator, the minister, the legislator, and the social worker. In fact, all who in any capacity put their hands to this noble undertaking are co-workers with him whose divine ideal was to be consummated in the Kingdom of God on earth.

The ministry, therefore, is taking on a great variety of forms of service, and the pastor is overtaxed. The church, moreover, is slow to recognize the principle of the division of labor and to employ a sufficient number of paid officers. Only the pressing importance of work for boys can excuse one for suggesting another duty to the conscientious and overworked pastor. Already too much has been delegated to him alone. Every day his acknowledged obligations outrun his time and strength, and he must choose but a few of the many duties ever pressing to be done. Yet there is no

phase of that larger social and educational conception of the pastor's work that has in it more of promise than his ministry to boys. Whatever else must go, the boy must not be neglected.

To answer this complex demand and the call of boyhood in particular the pastor must be a leader and an organizer. Otherwise, troubles and vicissitudes await him. In every field unused possibilities hasten the day of his departure. Idle persons who should have been led into worthy achievement for Christ and the church fall into critical gossip, and there soon follows another siege perilous for the minister's freight-wracked furniture, another flitting experience for his homeless children, another proof of his wife's heroic love, and another scar on his own bewildered heart.

It is, indeed, difficult for the pastor to adopt a policy commensurate with modern demands. He should lead, but on the other hand a very legitimate fear of being discredited through failure deters him; traditional methods hold the field; peace at any price and pleasurable satisfaction play a large part in church affairs; the adult, whose character is already formed, receives disproportionate attention; money for purposes of experimentation in church work is hard to get; everything points to moderation and the beaten path; and the way of the church is too often the way of least resistance. Small wonder if the minister sometimes capitulates to things as they are and resigns himself to the ecclesiastical treadmill. It is with the hope of encouraging some to defy such a fate and more specifically to enlist them in work for boys that these articles are written. For it requires courage to be governed by the facts as they confront the intelligent pastor, to direct one's effort where it is most needed and where it will, in the long run, produce the greatest and best results. To be sure, the adult needs the ministry of teaching, inspiration, correction, and comfort to fit him for daily living; but, as matters now stand, the chief significance of the adult lies in the use that can be made of him in winning the next generation for Christ. In so far as the adult membership may contribute to this it may lay claim to the best that the minister has. In so far as it regards his ministry as a means of personal pleasure, gratification, and religious luxury it is both an insult to him and an offense to his Master.

A successful ministry to boys, whether by the pastor himself or by those whom he shall inspire and guide, is fundamental in good pastoral work. Boys now at the age of twelve or fifteen will, in a score of years, manage the affairs of the world. All that has been accomplished—the inventions, the wealth, the experience in education and government, the vast industrial and commercial systems, the administration of justice, the concerns of religion—all will pass into their control; and they who, with the help of the girls of today, must administer the world's affairs, are, or may be, in our hands now when their ideals are nascent and their whole natures in flux. Boys' work, then, is not providing harmless amusement for a few troublesome youngsters; it is the natural way of capturing the modern world for Jesus Christ. It lays hold of life in the making, it creates the masters of tomorrow; and may pre-empt for the Kingdom of God the varied activities and startling conquests of our titanic age. Think of the great relay of untamed and unharnessed vigor, a new nation exultant in hope, undaunted as yet by the experiences that have halted the passing generation: what may they not accomplish? As significant as the awakening of China should the awakening of this new nation be to us. In each case the call for leadership is imperative, and the best ability is none too good. Dabblers and incompetent persons will work only havoc, whether in the Celestial Empire or in the equally potent Kingdom of Boyhood. The bookworm, of course, is unfit even if he could hear the call, and the nervous wreck is doomed even if he should hear it; but the fit man who hears and heeds may prevent no small amount of delinquency and misery, and may deliver many from moral and social insolvency.

If a minister can do this work even indirectly he is happy, but if he can do it directly by virtue of his wholesome character, his genuine knowledge and love of boys, his athletic skill, and his unabated zest for life, his lot is above that of kings and his reward above all earthly riches.

Then, too, it is not alone the potential value of boys for the Kingdom of God, and what the minister may do for them; but what may they not do for him? How fatal is the boy collective to all artificiality, sanctimony, weakness, make-believe, and jointless dig-

nity and how prone is the ministry to these psychological and semi-physical pests! For owing to the demands of the pulpit and of private and social intercourse, the minister finds it necessary to talk more than most men. He must also theorize extensively because of the very nature of theological discipline. Moreover, he is occupied particularly with those affairs of the inner life which are as intangible as they are important. His relation with people is largely a Sunday relation, or at any rate a religious one, and he meets them on the pacific side. Very naturally they reveal to him their best selves, and, true to Christian charity and training, he sees the best in everyone. If the women of his parish receive more than their proper share of attention the situation is proportionately worse. It follows that the minister needs the most wholesome contact with stern reality in order to offset the subtle drift toward a remote, theoretical, or sentimental world. In this respect commercial life is more favorable to naturalness and virility; while a fair amount of manual labor is conducive to sanity, mental poise, and sound judgment as to the facts of life. The minister must have an elemental knowledge of and respect for objective reality; and he must know human nature.

Now among all the broad and rich human contacts that can put the minister in touch with vital realities there is none so electric, so near to revelation as the boy. Collectively he is frank to the point of cruelty, and as elemental as a savage. Confronted alone and by the minister, who is not as yet his chum, he reveals nothing but the minister's helplessness. Taken in company with his companions and in his plays he is a veritable searchlight laying bare those manly and ante-professional qualities which must underlie an efficient ministry. Later life, indeed, wears the mask, praises dry sermons, smiles when bored, and takes careful precautions against spontaneity and the indiscretions of unvarnished truth; but the boy among his fellows and on his own ground represents the normal and unfettered reaction of the human heart to a given personality. The minister may be profoundly benefited by knowing and heeding the frank estimate of a "bunch" of boys. They are the advance agents of the final judgment; they will find the essential man. May it not be with him as with Kipling's Tomlin-

son, who, under the examination of both "Peter" and the "little devils," was unable to qualify for admission either to heaven or hell:

And back they came with the tattered Thing, as children after play,
And they said: "The soul that he got from God he has bartered clean away.
We have threshed a stuck of print and book, and winnowed a chattering wind
And many a soul wherefrom he stole, but his we cannot find:
We have handled him, we have dandled him, we have seared him to the bone,
And sure if tooth and nail show truth he has no soul of his own."

Fortunately, however, ministerial professionalism is on the wane. Protestantism, in its more democratic forms, rates the man more and the office less, and present-day tests of practical efficiency are adverse to empty titles and pious assumption. To be "Reverend" means such character and deeds as compel *reverence* and not the mere "laying on of hands." Work with boys discovers this basis, for there is no place for the holy tone in such work, nor for the strained and vapid quotation of Scripture, no place for excessively feminine virtues, nor for the professional hand-shake and the habitual inquiry after the family's health. In a very real sense many a minister can be saved by the boys; he can be saved from that invidious classification of adult society into "men, women, and ministers" which is credited to the sharp insight of George Eliot.

Then, too, the minister is in need of a touch of humor in his work. The sadness of human failure and loss, the insuperable difficulties of his task, the combined woes of his parish, the decorum and seriousness of pulpit work—all operate to dry up the healthy spring of humor that bubbled up and overran in his boyhood days. What health there is in a laugh, what good-natured endurance in the man whose humor enables him to "side-step" disastrous and unnecessary encounters and to love people none the less, even when they provoke inward merriment. The boys' pastor will certainly take life seriously, but he cannot take it somberly. Somewhere in his kind, honest eye there is a glimmer, a blessed survival of his own boyhood.

So, being ministered to by the comradeship of boys, he retains his sense of fun, fights on in good humor, detects and saves himself on the verge of pious caricature and solemn pathos; knows how to meet important committees on microscopic reforms as well as self-appointed theological inquisitors and all the insistent cranks that waylay a busy pastor. Life cannot grow stale; and by letting the boys lead him forth by the streams of living water and into the whispering woods he catches again the wild charm of that all-possible past: the smell of the campfire, the joyous freedom and good health of God's great out-of-doors. Genius and success in life depend largely upon retaining the boyish quality of enthusiastic abandon to one's cause, the hearty release of one's entire energy in a given pursuit, and the conviction that the world is ever new and all things possible. The thing in men that defies failure is the original boy, and "no man is really a man who has lost out of him all the boy."

The boy may also be a very practical helper in the pastor's work. In every community there are some homes in which the pastor finds it almost impossible to create a welcome for himself. Misconceptions of long standing, anti-church sentiments, old grievances block the way. But if in such a home there is a boy whose loyalty the pastor has won through association in the boys' club, at play, in camp—anywhere and anyhow—his eager hand will open both home and parental hearts to the wholesome friendship and kindly counsel of the minister of Christ. When the boy's welfare is at stake how many prejudices fade away! The reliable sentiment of fathers and mothers dictates that he who takes time to know and help their boy is of all persons a guest to be welcomed and honored, and withal, a practical interpreter of Christianity. The pastor whose advance agent is a boy has gracious passport into the homes where he is most needed. He has a friend at court. His cause is almost won before he has uttered one syllable of a formal plea.

Further, it must be apparent to all intelligent observers that the churches in most communities are in need of a more visible social sanction for their existence. In the thought of many they are expensive and over-numerous institutions detached from the actual community life and needs. Boys' work constitutes one

visible strand of connection with the live needs of the neighborhood; and, human nature being what it is, this tangible ministry is essential to the formation of a just popular estimate of the church and the ministry. Talk is easy and the market is always overstocked. The shortage is in deeds, and the doubtful community is saying to the minister, "What do you do?" It is well if among other things of almost equal importance he can reply, "We are saving your boys from vice and low ideals, from broken health and ruined or useless lives, by providing for wholesome self-expression under clean and inspiring auspices. The Corban of false sanctity has been removed; our plant and our men are here to promote human welfare in every legitimate way." Boys' work affords a concrete social sanction that has in it a wealth of sentiment and far-reaching implications.

Closely allied with this is the help that the boy renders as an advertiser. The boy is a tremendous promoter of his uppermost interest; and, while boys' work must not be exploited for cheap and unworthy advertising purposes but solely for the good of the boy himself, the fact remains that the boy is an enterprising publicity bureau. The minister who gives the boy his due of love, service, and friendship will unwittingly secure more and better publicity than his more scholastic and less human brother. In the home and at school, here, there, and everywhere, these unrivaled enthusiasts sound the praises of the institution and the man. Others of their own kind are interested and reluctant adults are finally drawn into the current. The man or church that is doing a real work for boys is as a city set on a hill.

The pastor needs the boys because his task is to enlist and train the Christians and churchmen of the future. These should be more efficient and devoted than those of the present, and should reckon among their dearest memories the early joyous associations formed within the church. Many thoughtful ministers are perplexed by the alienation of wage-earners from the church; but what could not be accomplished in the betterment of this condition if for one generation the churches would bend their utmost devotion and wisdom to maintaining institutions that would be worth while for all the boys of the community? A boy genuinely

interested and properly treated is not going to turn his back upon the institution or the man who has given him the most wholesome enjoyment and the deepest impressions of his life. The reason why the church does not get and hold the boy of the wage-earner, or any other boy, is because it stupidly ignores him, his primary interests, and his essential nature; or goes to the extreme bother of making itself an insufferable bore.

The reflex influence of boys' work upon the church herself should not be ignored. Here is a great plant moldering away almost in silence. Not to mention the auditorium, even the Sunday-school quarters and lecture-room are very little used, and this in communities trained to sharp economic insight and insisting already that the public-school buildings be made to serve the people both day and night and in social as well as educational lines. The basement is perhaps the most vulnerable point in the armor of exclusive sanctity that incases the church. Here, if anywhere, organized church work for boys may be tolerated. Whenever it is, lights begin to shine from the basement window several evenings a week, a noisy enthusiasm echoes through the ghostly spaces above, in a literal and figurative sense cobwebs are brushed away. The stir is soon felt by the whole church. A sense of usefulness and self-confidence begins to possess the minds of the members. Things are doing; and the dignity and desirability of having some part in an institution where things are doing inspires the members and attracts non-members:

It will be a sad day for the pastor and the church when they agree to delegate to any other institution all organized work for boys and especially those features which the boys themselves most enjoy. The ideal ministry to boyhood must not be centralized away from the church nor taken altogether out of the hands of the pastor. There is no place where the work can be done in a more personal way, and with less danger of subordinating the interests of the individual boy to mammoth institutional machinery and ambition, than in the church. The numerous small groups in the multitude of churches afford unequaled opportunity for intimate friendship, which was pre-eminently the method of Jesus, and the full play of a man's influence upon boy character.

The pastor who abdicates, and whose church is but a foraging ground for other institutions which present a magnificent exhibit of social service, may, indeed, be a good man, but he is canceling the charter of the church of tomorrow. It is at best a close question as to how the church will emerge from her present probation, and the pastor should be wise enough to reckon with the estimate in which the community and the boy hold him and the organization that he serves. And if he wants business men of the future who will respect and support the church, laboring men who will love and attend the church, professional men who will believe in and serve an efficient church, he must get the boys who are to be business men, wage-earners, and professional men, and he must hold them.

If he is concerned that there should be strong, capable men to take up the burden of church leadership in the future let him create such leadership in his own spiritual image from the plastic idealism of boyhood. Let the hero-worship age, without a word of compulsion or advice, make its choice with him present as a sample of what the minister can be, and tomorrow there will be no lack of virile high-class men in pulpit and parish. As a rule the ideals that carry men into the ministry are born, not in later youth nor in maturity, but in the period covered by the early high-school years; and the future leadership of the church is secure if the right kind of ministers mingle with boys of that age on terms of unaffected friendship and wholesome community of interest.

Then too there are the riches of memory and gratitude that bulk so large in a true pastor's reward. If in the years to come the minister wishes to warm his heart in the glow of happy memories and undying gratitude, let him invest his present energy in the service of boys. If the minister could but realize the vast significance of such work, if he could feel the lure of those untold values so as to have, in a legitimate way, the thrill that gamblers feel, if he could but know that he is swinging incipient forces of commanding personality into their orbits, directing destiny for the individual, predetermining for righteousness great decisions of the future, laying hold of the very kingdoms of this world for Christ, he surely would never again bemean himself in his own thought nor discount his peerless calling.

To be sure, there are certain satisfactions that a minister may lose all too quickly in these days. The spell of his eloquence may soon pass; the undivided love of all the people is no permanent tenure of him who speaks the truth even in love; speedy dissatisfaction and unbridled criticism are, alas, too often the practice of church democracy; but that man who has won the love of boys has thrown about himself a bodyguard whose loyalty will outmatch every foe.

In the hour of reaction from intense and unrewarded toil the empty chambers of the preacher's soul may echo in bitterness the harsh misanthropy of a scheming world. Then it is that he needs the boys, the undismayed defenders of his faith. Let him name their names until the ague goes out of his heart and the warm compassion of the Man of Galilee returns. To be a hero and an ideal in the estimate of anyone is indeed a great call to the best that is in us; and when the minister, in the dark day or the bright, hears the acclaim of his bodyguard let him believe that it is the call of God to manhood that has the triple strength of faith, hope, and love.

All of this and much more they surely can and will do for him, and if the pastor who thinks that he has no field or who is getting a bit weary or professional in the routine ministry to unromantic middle life could but behold within his parish, however small, this very essence of vital reality, this allurement of unbounded possibility, this challenge of a lively paganism, and this greatest single opportunity to bring in the Kingdom of God, he would, in the very discovery of the boy and his significance, re-create himself into a more useful, happy, and genuine man. Is it not better to find new values in the old field than to pursue superficial values in a succession of new fields?